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# EDUCATION—PRIMARY AND SECONDARY.

BY

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[*A Paper Read at the Church Congress, Brighton, 1874.*]

Is the Education Act of 1870 working justly and satisfactorily, or ought some of its provisions to be modified or altered? It is doing much to secure the erection of schools, and increased attendance of scholars. Is this being accomplished without unfairly injuring existing schools, or is it creating a sense of injustice in those previously interested in the cause of education? Is the new system working smoothly, or are rankling sores being created that it is wise to try and heal before they spread further?

There are three parties in the State of whom we may fairly ask these questions. There are, first, those who have already expended much time and money in the cause of popular education. These must be considered under two heads, for whilst the two are agreed that it is desirable to give a religious education, they differ as to what constitutes a religious education. One party means by these words religion with a definite creed; the other, creedless or unsectarian religious teaching. Beside these, there is a third party, which advocates secular instruction. This party differs from the others, in that it has at present done nothing for education beyond criticising what others have done; it has expended no money in erecting or maintaining schools, and it has accomplished nothing by which to test its capacity for practically dealing with the question; but it has created a violent agitation on the subject, and claims to represent the nation. Let us hear what answer each of these would give to our questions.

As the Church of England has done the most in this great cause, let us first hear what its advocates have to say. It has provided school accommodation for 1,816,911 children, at a cost to its supporters of about £8,383,000, supplemented by grants from the Committee of Council to the amount of £1,269,039.\* Upon the maintenance of these schools it last year expended £427,184, raised by voluntary contributions to meet

\* In the Bluebook of 1872, the grants from the Committee of Council amounted to the sum named above, and it is stated that £3,217,937 had been given by the promoters of the schools assisted, which would accommodate 844,558 scholars. Supposing the remainder of the accommodation provided without help from the Committee of Council to have cost the same per child as that provided with their help, the sum named above would be the amount expended.

£451,500 paid by scholars, and £549,426 out of the Government grant. What do the promoters of these schools say of the working of the Act of 1870?

(1.) They say it has injured them in every place where it is in active operation by undue competition. They assert that School Boards plant new schools, erected at a cost of nearly double of what was expended upon voluntary schools, in unfair proximity to existing schools, and in numbers greatly in excess of the educational wants of the places where they are built; and that the attendance of children at previously existing schools is thereby diminished. These last two points they prove by showing that the increased attendance of children in 1869 was equal to 82.25 per cent. of the school accommodation provided during that year; and in 1870 it was equal to 88.25 per cent.; but in 1872 only 37 per cent. of the school accommodation provided was occupied, and in 1873 only 51 per cent. The result consequently is, that whereas in 1870, of every 100 school places existing 61.34 were filled, and 38.66 empty; in 1873 only 57.4 are occupied, and 42.6 unoccupied. When it is remembered that these figures represent the whole school supply in England and Wales, and that the excessive supply of schools is only in certain places, it will be seen how severely some schools must be suffering.

(2.) That this undue competition has greatly increased the rates, and thereby rendered it more difficult to obtain subscriptions. Moreover, voluntary schools are themselves taxed with rates for the support of Board schools, and so the cost of maintaining them is increased.

(3.) That when voluntary schools are overwhelmed by the excessive competition brought to bear upon them, and the consequent loss of income derived from voluntary subscriptions, they can be handed over forever to a School Board, without any deference being paid to their trustees. So that schools erected for the express purpose of training children to be members of the Church of England can be transferred to a body bound by Act of Parliament not to allow the Apostles' Creed or the Church Catechism to be taught within their walls. This can be accomplished, though every person who subscribed towards the erection of such schools should protest against the transfer. This has actually been done in several cases. And when the National Society opposed in Chancery one such transfer of a school that had not been erected seven years, and to the transfer of which every person who had contributed to its erection objected, the Vice-Chancellor decided the case against them. If the possibility that certain founders of schools, who died more than two hundred years since, might have sympathised with Nonconformist views is sufficient cause to hinder schools so founded from being handed over to the Church, what shall be said of the justice which permits schools founded by members of the Church of England, in order that the doctrines of the Church of England might be taught in them, to be confiscated in the lifetime of their founders, and, in spite of their urgent remonstrances, to purposes alien to their intentions and wishes?

But the Act of 1870 inflicts a still greater injustice upon members of the Church of England. It decrees, by the Cowper-Temple clause, that in no school founded or supported by rates can there be religious teaching of which they can approve. Nonconformists complain that a few shillings or pence of their money can be bestowed in paying the fees of poor children

at Church schools. Church people may justly complain that the whole of their rates is applied to the sustenance of schools founded to teach religion in the Nonconformist fashion—according to the principles of the British and Foreign School Society.

The original framers of the Bill, to their honour be it spoken, sought to guard against this possible injustice, and provided that grants in aid might be paid out of the rates to denominational schools. This clause was thrown out in the Committee of the House of Commons; and instead of it increased grants were promised in behalf of the Education Department to all schools. The loss inflicted by the withdrawal of the clause has proved a very real one; the gain by what was substituted for it very illusory. In the last Bluebook there is a comparative view of the annual income of elementary schools inspected for annual grants during the last ten years. I quote from this table. It gives the grant per child in Church schools as 8s. 9d. in 1870, 8s. 9½d. in 1871, 9s. 10¼d. in 1872, 10s. 10d. in 1873; \* in 1864 it was 11s. 3d. The increased grant, therefore, according to this table, was 2s. 1d. in excess in 1873 over what it was in 1870, and less than what it had been in 1864. In the same volume there is an abstract of the expenditure in elementary schools. In Church schools, the education of each child cost in 1870, £1, 5s. 7½d.; in 1871, £1, 5s. 9¼d.; in 1872, £1, 7s. 8d.; in 1873, £1, 10s. 1d. Whilst therefore the grant had only increased by 2s. 1d. per child in 1873 over 1870, the expenditure had grown by 4s. 5½d., so that the managers of schools were really worse off by 2s. 4½d. per child in 1873 than they were in 1870. This growth of expense has been entirely caused by the competition of School Boards. The money they expend being provided by rates, they can afford to be lavish; and as their object is to excel voluntary schools, they can and do outbid them, and so expenditure is increased.

The Education Act of 1870 may thus be shown to have been a serious injury to the Church of England, and its whole working is towards weakening its hold upon the education of the country. When it passed, some sanguine Church people congratulated themselves that it was no worse. Such an estimate could only have been formed by men who anticipated that a Liberal majority would utterly destroy all Church schools.

The Roman Catholics and the Jews equally dislike the operation of the Education Act from their respective points of view; and the Roman Catholics have expended about £605,000 of their own money, supplemented by grants from the Education Department to the amount of £42,770, in providing school accommodation for 113,490 children; whilst the Jews have erected large schools, at their own cost, in London, if not elsewhere, but as these are included in the school accommodation provided by the Nonconformists, I cannot give exact figures; and as my time is limited, I must content myself with referring to what they have done, as I dare not attempt to state their objections in the few minutes allotted to me.

\* I ought to say that in another portion of the Bluebook the grant is stated to be 12s. 6¾d. for each child in average attendance in Church schools in 1873; this is nearly 1s. 3d. per child higher than the amount I have given. It does not materially affect the argument, as the schools would still have to provide more by subscription in 1873 than in 1870. There is no comparative view of the grant as thus stated with what was given in other years, and as there is in the page I have quoted from, it was on that account I took it, as there are probably deductions which are made in the one case and not in the other.

Let us next inquire what the Nonconformists think of the working of the Act. Before it passed, some bodies of them had done a good deal for education. They have provided school accommodation for 556,783 children, at a cost to themselves of about £2,310,000, supplemented by grants from the Education Department to the amount of £349,748, and last year they expended £85,169 upon the maintenance of their schools.

At first sight it would seem as though a large number of them must be content. The various bodies who united to support the British and Foreign School Society, and by whom \* not quite two-thirds of the Nonconformist schools have been built, find their system of religious instruction invested with the dignity of being the only established form of religious education. They see Churchmen, in consequence, compelled to support it, in spite of their own preferences, but as a less evil than a system of mere secular instruction. Moreover, they are enabled to transfer their schools, whenever they are so disposed, to School Boards, secure of finding the selfsame system of religious teaching carried on as themselves had established, in very many cases able to obtain the nomination of the same persons to manage the schools as previously formed the Committee of Management, and not infrequently, in addition, they receive from the School Board rent for the schoolroom thus transferred, and so provide, at the cost of the ratepayers, an acceptable endowment to the chapel with which the school is connected. Beside this, in less than three years School Boards have arranged to extend their system almost indefinitely; for they have borrowed three millions for the erection of schools in which their system of religious teaching must be followed unless the schools are to be secular.

It might have been thought that those who derived such advantages from the Education Act would have been satisfied with its working; but such has not proved to be the case. Having gained so much from the legislature, they think they ought to have obtained more. It is not enough for their system to be endowed, unless at the same time that of the Church is wholly overthrown. It is not enough that more than three millions to be paid out of the rates are to be expended in building schools; and that the system of religious teaching in these schools, if there is to be one, must be their own, and that this sum will be largely added to every year: all this counts for nothing if Church people are to have a few hundred thousands out of the taxes to supplement a million or two more of their own money for the erection of schools, though of such assistance there is now an absolute end. It is not enough for them that School Boards can expend more than a million a year upon the promotion of a scheme of education of which they approve, if a miserable sum of less than £6000 a year can be paid out of the rates for the education of a few poor Church children at Church schools. It is not enough for them that Churchmen have to pay pounds a year in rates for maintaining a religious system which they dislike, if themselves have to contribute a few farthings that may in any way benefit Church schools. Nay, still more remarkably, their own system of religious education has lost all its charms

\* Of schools aided by grants for building, those provided by the British and Foreign School Society accommodate 81,152 scholars, those furnished by the Wesleyans, 47,340; of the remainder, some belong to the Jews, whilst the great portion were built without Government help.



for them, when they see Church people willing that the children of the poor should be trained in it, rather than be brought up in hopeless ignorance of all religion and morality ; and they not infrequently oppose at School Boards the inculcation of religion in the very way which their co-religionists had founded a society to promote. It would seem as though in the eyes of such persons all religion ceased to be true when it became tolerable to Church people. I am far from saying that this is the course of action of the whole Nonconformist body ; but it is what has been done by that very influential portion of it which has violently protested against Clause 25, and which is agitating for a secular system of instruction.

What do the secularists say to the working of the Bill ? So long as private efforts were needed to establish schools, their voice was all but unheard. So long as personal gifts and self-denials were required to further the education of the people, their zeal was kept within the prudent bounds of an occasional speech at a political gathering. But now that they may tax other people for the purpose, the case is altered. Their strength lies in the divisions of those to whom they are opposed ; and had Church people been betrayed into following the example set them by the Nonconformists, the secularist party might have triumphed. The Nonconformists, as a body, have opposed paying the fees of poor Church people at Church schools out of the rates much more eagerly than they have resisted the exclusion of religious instruction from Board schools ; whilst Church people have seen their own religious teaching extruded from all Board schools, and yet have eagerly contended for the religious teaching of the Nonconformists in those schools rather than they should become secular. For when the cry of religious education has been raised at School Board elections, the system of religious education intended is that of the British and Foreign School Society, and the British and Foreign School Society is the educational organ of the Nonconformists. We think Church people have acted wisely and religiously in doing as they have done.

So far the secularist party has not made much progress. At Birmingham they have succeeded in banishing all religious teaching from the schools, but there has been too much religious feeling amongst the people to permit such a system to extend elsewhere. And it is one of the pleasanter features in this contest that the parents of the children to be taught are almost universally on the side of those who advocate definite religious instruction. So long as it was thought possible to make the parents' conscience a weapon against the Church management of Church schools, it was largely invoked ; but now that it is found to be on the side of religious teaching, it is treated as a matter of small concern. It is the objecting ratepayer who alone is supposed to be endowed with a conscience that ought to be respected. But notwithstanding all this, we may not shut our eyes to the fact that it will need great care to prevent a secular system from eventually triumphing. In the United States, at the first, a system of secular instruction would have been held in abhorrence : it is now universal. The only sure hindrance must be sought in absolute fairness to all. At present the popular feeling is strongly on the side of religious education ; any injustice, any unfair or onesided application of a rate-supported system, would certainly convert the popular feeling to the other side, as a means of escape from theological

differences. One great reason why I am anxious for a change in the present Act, is because I think that there is great injustice in its working ; it is only prevented from overturning all religious teaching by the self-restraint of Churchmen, who prefer giving an advantage to their rivals to risking the little religious teaching now given, and it is not wise to count upon the continuance of such self-restraint.

The alterations I should suggest in the Education Act are proposed to redress some of the wrongs which Churchmen now suffer ; though even if all were granted, the Education Act would continue to inflict injury upon the Church in the matter of education, whilst benefiting the denominations.

In the interests of fair play, we think the first change ought to be the repeal of the Cowper-Temple clause. In the metropolis, and in many large boroughs, it may eventually be found that the system it enforces is the only system making any pretence to be religious that is practicable : but this is a question for the ratepayers to determine. They have a right to choose for themselves how their schools shall be conducted. At present, Church people certainly pay at least half the rates everywhere. I believe, if the Nonconformists could ever have screwed up their courage so far as to permit us to have a religious census, it would have been seen that Church people are much more than one-half of the people. They ought not therefore to be excluded from having a single rate-supported school taught in their own way. The Nonconformist can have the schools instructed upon the principles he advocates—these secularist or infidel upon the principles he approves ; but the Churchman cannot have a Board school taught in the manner he thinks best, though every person who pays a rate for its maintenance might wish it to be so taught. I would in no way restrict the force of the conscience clause in the rate-supported school, but I think we might claim that during the time set apart for religious instruction, facilities should be given for allowing those interested in the children to teach them religion according to the principles of their parents. For instance, suppose a place where the existing system of religious teaching upon the principles of the British and Foreign School Society is in the ascendant : here allow Church people to teach the children of Church people Creed and Catechism in the class-room ; and if the parents of a sufficient number of children should wish them to be taught in another faith, say that of the Roman Catholic, the Wesleyan-Methodist, or the Jew, then let proper facilities be provided for them. Or reverse the case : suppose a borough or a parish where the School Board decided that the teaching of the school should be in accordance with the teaching of the Church ; then give like facilities for parents of children wishing their children to be otherwise taught, to obtain religious instruction according to their own tenets.

Again, provision is urgently needed to meet the case of voluntary schools unable longer to support an independent existence. It ought to be remembered that these schools have special claims for consideration : for a long time they supplied the whole of the primary education of the country. They were called into existence in many cases by the proffered help of the State ; they seemed by such invitation to have fair play guaranteed to them. The promoters of the Act of 1870 promised to respect their fair claims upon consideration, and it cannot be said that these promises have been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the managers of voluntary

schools. A system of rates is prejudicial to a system of voluntary subscriptions, and in many places completely destroys it. About twelve millions of money have been given by the charitable for the erection of these schools. Policy, not less than justice, therefore demands that they should be dealt with upon principles of which their founders would approve. For our own part, we infinitely prefer the voluntary principle to any other for educating the people. I devoutly hope that most of the voluntary schools, particularly the Church schools, will continue as they now are ; but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that some will succumb. Applications from Church schools are now being made to the London School Board for absorption into their system more frequently than I at all like ; in fact, I feel that an evil is committed whenever a transfer is accepted. But I fear that in some cases such a result is inevitable. I wish, therefore, to see terms proposed that may be fair and just, so that the work of liberal founders may not be undone, or turned to a purpose of which they would disapprove. What I believe would meet the case would be this : whenever a transfer is made without rent being paid or pecuniary advantage secured to the founders or managers of the school, that then the teacher placed in charge of the school should be of the same religion with the founders, and that during the time devoted to religious instruction the teaching in the school should be in accordance with the provisions of the trust-deeds, facilities being given in the classrooms for other religious teaching when it is desired ; and in schools which had belonged to the Church, the clergyman of the parish should be allowed to teach ; in schools which had belonged to the Nonconformists or Wesleyans, the like liberty being accorded to their ministers.

Such an advantage would be but a small recompense for the great saving to the ratepayers of having the school buildings provided for them free of charge. Few schools in towns cost less than £2000. When this is borrowed with authority from the Education Department, it inflicts an annual charge of £110 for fifty years. When School Boards rent existing schools, they seldom pay less than 5s. per child per annum, which is nearly equal to one-half of the Government grant. Whichever of these reckonings we take by which to estimate the value of the loan of school premises to a School Board without rent, we shall have a sum which would do far more than pay a teacher for giving religious instruction for one hour a day. It could not, therefore, be fairly said that religious teaching was paid for by the rates, if the plan now proposed were adopted. If the religious convictions of Churchmen or other school founders cannot be respected so far as to permit this to be done, then we ought to agitate for power to be given to those who pay the rates to be able to allocate the sums they pay to schools of which they approve. It cannot be just for the Nonconformist ratepayer to claim a right to interfere with the disposal of every part of the sum to which he contributes a very small proportion, whilst the voices of all other ratepayers are disregarded. And yet this seems to be our present condition.

Should the very modest proposals I have made for the removal of present injustice be adopted, it will be necessary that some security should be given to the Church, and other founders of schools, against what might prove an abuse. There can be no doubt that the tendency of the changes suggested would be to remove objections to the formation of School Boards

and the transfer of schools. And I am aware that many will object to my proposals on this account ; but I would earnestly ask such persons to consider whether it is not desirable for us to try to make the national system tolerable to Church people, whilst we have the opportunity, rather than leave our poorer brethren to a hopeless struggle. Some schools are now being transferred ; I fear that I see signs of that number increasing. Now such a transfer means that a school founded to promote definite religious teaching is handed over to a system which absolutely prohibits such teaching. Alter the Act as I suggest, and then the teaching for which the school was founded will still be given, though the religious body for whose benefit the school was erected will lose many other benefits which it previously enjoyed in its use of the school. But whilst advocating this change, I think we must take care that the founders of schools are protected against the complete alienation of their freeholds. Let facilities be given for leasing the buildings for an indefinite period, terminable by a notice of two or three years, but protect those who would be willing to lease their schools upon such terms as have been mentioned from the possible evils which might befall them by a sudden change of policy on the part of the legislature. Our object is to preserve religious education in our primary schools : if instead of leases we had transfers of the freeholds, our object might be defeated by a vote of the legislature, compelling the instruction in all Board schools to be secular.

Much might be said in favour of a liberal system of grants in aid by Boards to voluntary schools, as proposed by the Act when first introduced. Personally, I should very much prefer such a system to what I have now proposed. It would have the advantage of being more economical, and of retaining the management of schools in the hands of those who now overlook them ; but my object has been to propose the smallest amount of change needed to make the present system tolerable to Churchmen possessing any real religious convictions, and to do it in the way which would be least objectionable to those from whom they differ in matters of faith. I venture to hope that these alterations will be made, because they would go far towards removing sore feelings and heart-burnings which exist, and they would enable Churchmen to take a more hearty interest in promoting the education of the people in conjunction with School Boards.

I will conclude with simply recapitulating the changes I wish to see made in the law :—

- 1st. Repeal of the Cowper-Temple clause.
- 2d. Freedom to give separate religious instruction in Board Schools.
- 3d. That in schools transferred without pecuniary consideration, the religion taught during the time devoted to religious instruction shall be in accordance with the trust-deeds of the school, permission being given to impart different religious instruction in the class rooms.
- 4th. That better provision should be made against the confiscation of schools to purposes not intended by their founders.













